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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8306
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000745

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/MARCHESE/HARDING
STATE FOR NEA/ELA, NEA/FO:ATACHCO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/23/2017

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: UNIFIL COMMANDER POSITIVE ON MANDATE,
CONCERNED ABOUT LAF

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: Section 1.4 (d
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SUMMARY

11. (C) UNIFIL Commander Major-General Claudio Graziano feels confident that UNIFIL's mandate would be renewed by the UNSC in August and, if given the opportunity for a wish list, he would like to expand UNIFIL's area of operations beyond the Litani River and have a clearer interpretation of the rules of engagement. He indicated that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) are "overstretched" and may have problems maintaining deployments in the south, but any security vacuum caused by a short-term redeployment of LAF troops to the north could be temporarily handled by UNIFIL. UNIFIL has been able to hamper Hizballah's movement of weapons in the south and keep them from reestablishing its bunkers near the border. Graziano concluded by stating that the LAF-IDF technical plan for demarcating the Blue Line, and later resolution of Sheba'a Farms, could be achieved, but progress on these issues rests more with the Israelis than the Lebanese. End Summary.

GRAZIANO: POSITIVE ON EXTENSION OF UNIFIL'S MANDATE

12. (C) On May 23, the Ambassador, along with DATT and Poloff, hosted lunch for United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) Commander Major-General Claudio Graziano, UNIFIL Political Affairs Officer Milos Strugar, and UNIFIL military aides. Graziano gave a positive impression of UNIFIL's activities in the south, and indicated that he was confident that UNIFIL's mandate would be renewed by the UNSC in New York in August. He seemed unconcerned about whether or not the GOL specifically requested such a renewal, although he expected that the Siniora government would continue to give its approval for UNIFIL's continued deployment in Lebanon.

CHAPTER VII COULD BE USED TO MAINTAIN UNIFIL
IN CASE OF TWO GOVERNMENTS

13. (C) Graziano did not doubt the Siniora government's support for UNIFIL. But he did indicate some concern that if the ongoing political stalemate resulted in a second, parallel government, such a scenario could call into question

the legitimacy of UNIFIL's monitoring operations in the south. He theorized that if such a scenario came about, the UNSC could consider passing a Chapter VII resolution to maintain UNIFIL in the field, but the UNSC process could prove difficult because the Council would have identify the specific "bad guys" as the rationale for adoption -- that is, be explicit about Hizballah. This aspect would make it unlikely that the UNSC could garner nine votes with no vetoes. Milos Strugar added that hopefully the two government scenario will come to pass and a "simple rollover" of the current mandate will be achieved.

MANDATE IMROVEMENTS: EXPANDED OPERATIONS
AND CLEAR RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

14. (C) Graziano indicated that if given the opportunity to have a wish list to change UNIFIL's mandate, he would enlarge the area of operations for UNIFIL. He specifically highlighted the area between the towns of Kafr Kila and Metulla that runs north along the Litani river. In this area, UNIFIL's monitoring is restricted to a narrow strip of land that lies between the Litani River and the border of Israel. He explained that UNIFIL's mandate does not allow for patrolling beyond the Litani River. Theoretically, Hizballah could set up rocket positions on the other side of the river and fire over the strip of land and hit Israeli territory. Graziano added that the route along this piece of land presents a "bottleneck" to which Hizballah militants could set up rocket positions to target UNIFIL units. Also, Graziano indicated that he would like to see a renewed mandate "clarify" the rules of engagement for UNIFIL troops. He indicated that he wanted a clear interpretation that would

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allow him to fulfill the UNIFIL mandate and show a strong commitment to enforcing UNSC 1701.

LAF OVERSTRETCHED AND NEEDS
MATERIAL ASSISTANCE

15. (C) Graziano put forward his concern that the LAF was "overstretched" and ill-equipped to handle all of its security duties in Lebanon, and especially its deployments in the south. The drain on troops and materiel due to the fighting with Fatah al-Islam in the Palestinian refugee camp in Nahr el-Bared has only highlighted the shortages in personnel and equipment. He stressed that the LAF does not have enough weapons, ammunition and equipment to sustain long-term combat situations. Graziano recognized the recent USG effort to provide 5.56mm ammunition to the LAF, but advocated that Western countries needed to increase their military assistance in areas such as artillery rounds and communications equipment.

16. (C) Graziano indicated that the conflict in the North could start to affect the LAF's ability to maintain deployments in the south. While concerned by this development, he stated that any "temporary" redeployment of LAF troops, but no more than 2,000, from the south to the north could be handled by UNIFIL. He said that it would not pose a loss of security in the south because UNIFIL could fill the vacuum and monitor the area. The DATT asked how long "temporary" meant; Graziano indicated that UNIFIL could fill the gap for "60 to 90 days" without a significant drop in monitoring and patrolling in the South.

UNIFIL HAS HAMPERED HIZBALLAH ARMS MOVEMENT
IN THE SOUTH

17. (C) Graziano said that Hizballah's ability to move arms and weapons around had been greatly restricted by UNIFIL's presence. He indicated that UNIFIL's success in monitoring has resulted in Hizballah moving its bigger weapons north of

the Litani River outside of UNIFIL's area of operation. There has been little evidence that Hizballah has rebuilt its bunkers or tried to reestablish its battle positions near the Blue Line. Graziano did admit that small quantities of small arms may be entering the area, but not at the level required for Hizballah to regain its pre-war posture.

DEMARCATIION OF BLUE LINE AGREEMENT
AWAITING ON ISRAELI APPROVAL

18. (C) Graziano indicated that at the last tripartite meeting on May 2, there had been agreement by Lebanon and Israel to a standard text on a technical plan to demarcate the Blue Line.

While cleared by the LAF and IDF on the technical level and approved by the Lebanese government, it was still awaiting approval by the Israeli government. Graziano seemed to put the blame on the Israelis for the lack of approval, but further discussion indicated that the delay might be more a question of Israeli bureaucracy rather than a refusal to approve the plan. Milos Strugar stated that one possible explanation for the Israeli delay could be that the Lebanese favor a method of using precise points based on the 2000 demarcation line, while Israel favors a more "vague" definition of the line which can be discussed between parties and adjusted.

IDF WITHDRAWAL FROM SHEBA'A FARMS REQUIRES SECURITY AGREEMENT

19. (C) Graziano stated that resolution of Sheba'a Farms would depend more on getting the IDF to agree on a security plan which would allow them to withdraw from the area and turn over security to UNIFIL troops, than on settling the issue of whether Lebanon or Syria had sovereignty over the area. He explained that resolving the issue of Sheba,a Farms is extremely difficult, because the geographical area is hard to identify. A cartographer is needed to define the area and identify exact geographical boundaries. Second, getting the

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IDF to agree on the exact process for turnover of the area has taken longer than expected. Graziano stated that Israelis really do not want to have to deal with Sheba'a Farms and are willing to give it up, but agreeing to a process for turning over security seems to be the main impediment.

110. (C) Milos Strugar explained another complication, which is that UNIFIL,s mandate does not cover Sheba,a Farms. UNIFIL's mandate most likely would have to be changed to accommodate the expanded area of operations. Strugar said one option that is being considered is having the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) Observer Group set up a "de-militarized zone" and patrol the Sheba'a Farms area after the IDF withdraws its forces. Since UNTSO's mandate covers all of Lebanon, it would not have to go through a lengthy UN process to authorize such a change.
FELTMAN